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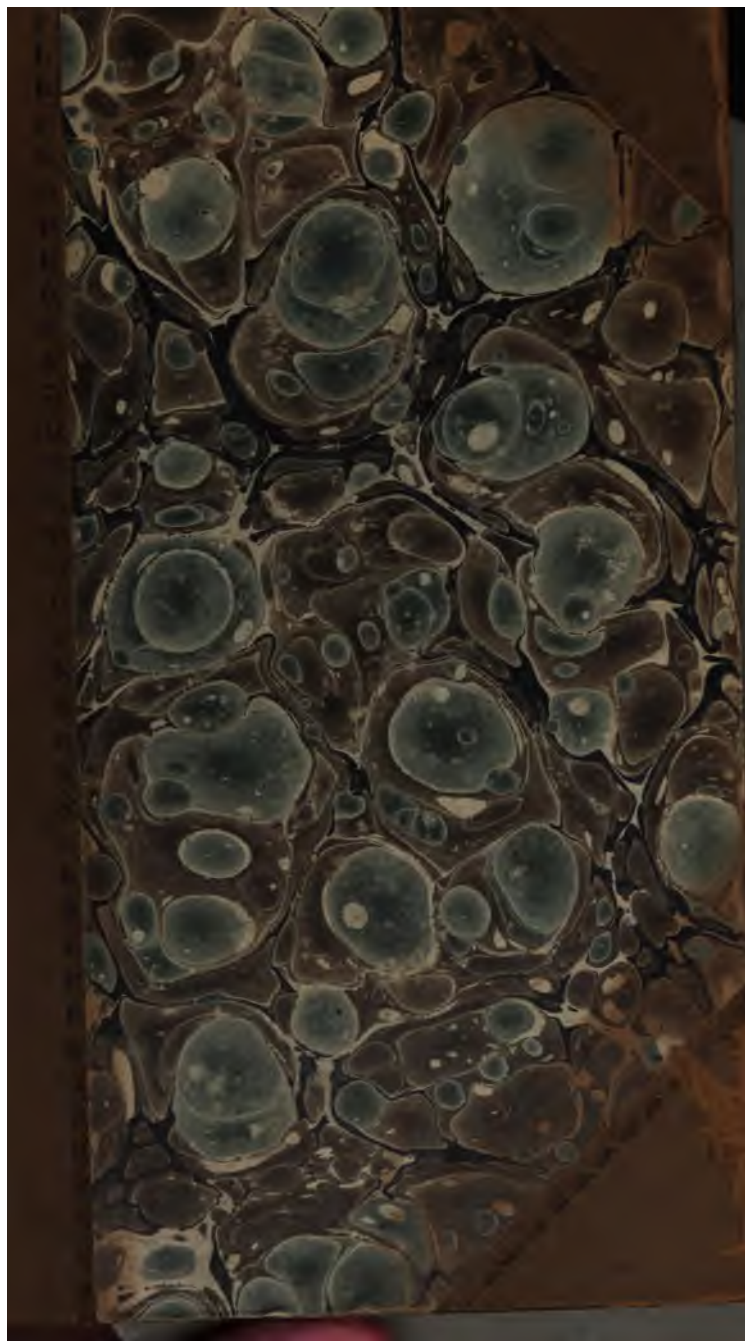
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# HELPS TO REPENTANCE.

## SIX LECTURES,

ADDRESSED

TO PERSONS OF DIFFERENT AGES;

DELIVERED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF STAGSDEN, BEDS.  
DURING THE SEASON OF LENT.

BY A. WESTOBY, M.A.

CURATE,

AND CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF GLASGOW.



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# LECTURES.

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## LECTURE I.

ON REPENTANCE, &c. ADDRESSED TO CHILDREN.

*(First Sunday in Lent.)*

PSALM lviii. 3.

“They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”

THIS is the account which the Psalmist gives of the children of wicked men in his day. He does not, indeed, wish it to be inferred that the children of righteous parents are by nature better than these, but he accounts for the early wickedness of some children above others—they receive no checks from parents or teachers,

and hence they go so soon astray from the ways of virtue and religion, even during the earliest days in which they become capable of exercising reason. If, happily, all children do not thus early turn aside into the ways of sin, they owe much of their preservation from open vice, during childhood, to the care which the ministers of religion have taken to provide instruction for their fathers and mothers; and the opportunities they afford them to learn to read the Bible, and to gain a knowledge of the law of God, and of the gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ. David declared that of himself, which is equally true of each one of us, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm li. 6.) And again, "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost." This is the case with every one of us; yet we are mercifully invited by God to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Though such be our corrupt nature, and such the early tendency of

our hearts, Jesus and his Apostles invite us to repent and believe the gospel.

We are again entered upon the season of Lent, which is a time set apart by a large portion of the universal church of Christ, for fasting, repentance, and prayer. The season of Lent calls upon the members of our church to consider the doctrine of repentance. It is, therefore, my intention, by the help of God, to employ the Sundays in Lent, to set forth the necessity of repentance toward God, its advantages, and the means of promoting it in persons of different ages and conditions in life.

The present sermon will have reference to children. To you, my dear children, I now address myself. This discourse is intended for your special benefit. The prophet David declares of children, who are not carefully watched, diligently taught, and earnestly prayed for, that "they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." This awful declaration

is, I fear, too true of you ; and it is still more fearfully true of those who do not receive christian instruction ; “ for a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” You need early education, for “ foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” However much you may dislike the labour of learning, the Scripture tells you, “ that the soul be without knowledge it is not good.”

In this Lecture we shall notice

I. The necessity of repentance before God, and of faith in Christ, to children.

II. The benefits which children obtain by them.

III. Some means of promoting these graces in children.

I. The necessity of repentance before God, and of faith in Christ, to children.

When the innocency of children is noted in the Bible, it is to be understood



as something comparative, and not absolute. Children are sinners not only by the imputation of Adam's transgression, but they are partakers of original sin, and hence they have dispositions and lustings towards evil, which early show themselves, by anger, jealousy, deceit, covetousness, and selfishness.

1. The Bible history shows this to be the case.

Not long after Adam and Eve sinned in paradise by eating of the forbidden fruit, and thus fell from their original righteousness, Eve bare Cain, who became the murderer of his brother Abel, and though such a crime had not before been known in the earth. "And wherefore slew he him?" "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." You see Cain became wicked, not by bad example, but by following the devices and desires of his own heart.

In Gen. v. 3, we read, that when "Adam was one hundred and thirty years old, he

begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth." When Adam was made at the first, he possessed the image and likeness of God; these he lost by his sin in the garden of Eden, and no image and likeness remained to him but those defaced by sin. Seth, therefore, was born in sin, and was subject to death. But Seth was made good by the Lord. You also, my dear children, are born evil, but you may be made good, by being born again: and indeed "you must be born again before you can enter into the kingdom of heaven." You have received the outward and visible sign, in baptism, of the washing of regeneration, but you must have the renewing of the Holy Ghost, the "inward and spiritual grace; a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness."

You must not think that those children only who were born before the world was drowned by the waters of a flood, were born in sin. See again what God says

of man after the family of Noah came forth from the ark. "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Gen. viii. 21.) The original Hebrew is still more strongly expressed: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his earliest infancy."

Children are by nature disposed to evil; they are inclined to break God's commandments, "they go astray as soon as they be born;" hence Solomon says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom."

After Abraham became the father of the faithful, he had a son born to him called Isaac, and the Lord commanded him to circumcise him when he was only eight days old. If there had been no sin in infants, the Lord would not have appointed them to receive so painful a rite as that of circumcision. By this we learn that children must be early cut off from sin, and separated to the service of God. As children among the Jews received the



rite of circumcision, so you were baptised while you were very young, to show that you must be washed from original sin.

2. We shall see the necessity of repentance in children, as we view some early examples of wickedness in them, and the judgments which the Almighty sent upon them, in consequence of their offences.

When God drowned the world for the wickedness of mankind, the children perished, not one was saved alive in the ark. Also when God overthrew the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven, the children perished as well as the parents. In the history of the prophet Elisha we have a remarkable instance of God's severity to children for their sins ; as you read in 2 Kings ii. 23, 24, " And Elisha went up from thence to Bethel ; and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said to him, Go up, thou bald-head ; go up, thou bald-head. And he turned back and looked upon

them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.” You see that children may be punished with death by a just and holy God. Fear before him, and repent before him, for all your wickedness. From the above examples of God’s just judgment upon wicked children see your own need of repentance. Do not say in your heart, I am not old enough to be punished for my sins. You may be great sinners, though you be only children. You may be young children of falsehood, young children of anger and passion, and revenge—young children of covetous practices—young children of rebellion, obstinacy, and disobedience. You may show many sinful tempers to your fathers and mothers,—to your teachers, and to your spiritual pastors and masters. For these, and for that evil heart from which they spring, you must repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

II. Seeing then that all children are by nature evil, and yet we read in the Bible of some good children, we direct you to consider the *benefits* which children obtain by repenting of their sins before God, and believing in his Son Jesus Christ.

Too many, alas! seem to think that children have nothing to do with repentance for sin, or with faith in Jesus, and love to him. They think it enough if children say their prayers, and learn the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. But children must be taught to *love* the doctrines and commandments of God, as well as to *learn* them. How many of mankind die when they are children! almost half of those who are born. Surely these “need to be born again.” They must be born of water and of the Spirit; for our Saviour says, “Verily I say unto you, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” You must become sorry for your sins—you must believe in

Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of them—you must love the Saviour who died to redeem you, and all mankind. You must love the Redeemer, and pray to him who rose again from the dead on the third day, and who is now sitting at the right hand of God, to pray for you ; from whence he will come at the last day to judge both the quick and the dead. In this way you may by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, become good and godly children. There have been good children, as young as you, who compose the Sunday-school. There have been children as young as many of you are, who have wept for their sins with the tears of true repentance. Let me direct you to a few.

1. Samuel.—In him we have an example of one who became pious at an early age : he served before the Lord and waited upon Eli the priest, when he was but a child. In 1 Sam. iii. 4—8, we are told,



“That the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, Here am I.” The Lord called him a second, third, and fourth time, “then Samuel answered, Speak, for thy servant heareth.” Samuel was now no older than some of you Sunday-school boys, yet the Lord told him more than he told Eli the priest. You cannot begin religion too young ; but alas ! you may begin it too late.

2. Abijah was but a child when he died, and yet we read, (1 Kings, xiv. 13,) “that in him there was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel.” There must be some good thing found in your hearts, or you cannot go to heaven when you die. Such good thing you cannot have without “the grace of God preventing you, that you may have a good will” to seek it, as a free gift from the Lord, who will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

3. Josiah is presented to us as an example of early piety. In 2 Chronicles

xxxiv. 3, we read, "For in the eighth year of his reign, when he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his Father." You may begin to be truly religious, at an earlier age than that in which Josiah sought after the Lord.

4. The example of Timothy serves to show how profitably religion may be cultivated in early life. St. Paul in his second epistle to Timothy chap. iii. 15, says, "And that from a child, thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The knowledge which Timothy so early acquired, rendered him, by the blessing of the Lord, an eminent minister of the gospel, while he was a young man. Hence St. Paul says to him, "Let no man despise thy youth." Let your youthful days be seasoned with religion; "for it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth."

5. Look at John the Baptist, who was

a good child, even from his birth : for it is said, “ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit.” He was sanctified from his birth ; and at that early period, he needed to be “ washed, to be sanctified, to be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” We need the same, my dear children ; may God make us in earnest to obtain these mercies, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

III. Let us now notice some means which you should use to promote repentance and faith.

1. Learn the need you have to repent of your sins, and to pray to Jesus Christ. If you were to die as young as the Sunday-school boy died, or as the little girl\* died, could you die happily without repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ? You could not ; you would be afraid to die. You would

\* These were two children who died in the parish, 1833, and who belonged to the Sunday-school.

be full of trouble. Do not hide this from yourselves, that you have sinned, and that you must repent—that you have no just reason to hope that it shall be well with you in death, and at the judgment seat of Christ, except you believe in Jesus who died for your sins, and who rose again for your justification.

2. Learn to pray to God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you his Holy Spirit, that he may make in you a new heart.

“You must be born again”—you must have your hearts renewed by the Lord, before you can love Christ, and his salvation. When God gives you his Holy Spirit, you will love to pray to him, and to read the Bible: you will love to come to church, and to join in the prayers, and the singing: you will hear sermons with profit and pleasure.

My dear children, when you say your prayers, think of God—“Our Father who is in heaven,” to whom you pray.



When you say the Lord's Prayer, think of Jesus Christ who made it, and who now prays for you at the right hand of God: think of the Holy Ghost, without whose help you cannot truly repent of your sins, or obtain the salvation of your souls.

3. Shut your eyes and your ears against evil.

Bad children often say bad words; turn away your ears from them, and get away from their company; for, "evil communications corrupt good manners." Bad children do things which are evil, and sinful, and hurtful to themselves; and which are very injurious to those who see them done. Much of that which we call virtue, in children as well as in grown up persons, consists in ignorance of vice. You must not therefore look at wicked children when they do sinful things, lest you learn to do the same. You may easily get bad habits, but you cannot easily break them off when they are once formed.

4. You must seek to be with them that fear the Lord, especially with good fathers, and mothers, and teachers, and ministers of religion. Solomon tells you this truth: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." (Prov. xiii. 20.)

The company of good children will not hurt you, if it does not lead you to neglect your present duty; and you are careful to learn good from them. Much play and sport will not, however, increase your happiness, or prepare you for a life of real enjoyment. You desire to be raised above the lowest state of want, but the wisest of men tells us, in Prov. xxi. 17, "He that loveth pleasure, shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil, shall not be rich." If you love play, you are in danger of forgetting religion, which is to you as well as all other persons, "the one thing needful." You have the example of our blessed Saviour in this matter. He began, in early life, to ask questions

of those who were much older than himself, as well as to give wise answers to those who questioned him; hence St. Luke, ii. 47, adds, "And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

5. You must read your Bible, and other good books as much as you can. These will furnish you with the knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ,—these will nourish up your minds in faith and in good doctrine. When children have once had their minds stored with the holy Scriptures, and they have been trained up in habits of daily prayer to God, they seldom sin as the wicked do, so as to take any lasting pleasure in its pursuit.

#### APPLICATION.

We have endeavoured to show to children the necessity they are under to repent of their sins before God. We have seen that children may be so wicked, as

to be cut off for their crimes, as those who were torn in pieces by wild beasts for mocking God's prophet. We have given some examples of early religion, in the persons of Samuel and others. We have pointed out some means of working repentance and faith in children; but, after all, we must pray to God to make our instructions useful to you, "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy." May God, therefore, for the sake of Jesus Christ, make this sermon a blessing to you, and may this application still further promote your piety, while we offer a few words,

1. *To children.* Hear us once more, my dear children. You must die. This event may happen to you while you are only children. What will become of you, if you go astray as soon as you are born, speaking lies? Unless you repent and turn to God, according to your capacity to exercise faith and repentance, you must, after death, have your place and



punishment with the devil and his angels. Flee then, I pray you, from the wrath to come. Begin this day to pray to Jesus Christ to give you a new heart, and to fit you for his heavenly kingdom. Then it will be well with you at all times, in childhood, and in youth, and in growing years, if God is pleased to extend your lives—then “all things will work together for good to you who love God.” Nothing shall harm you, seeing you are followers of that which is good.

2. *To parents.* O ye fathers and mothers, you have much duty laid upon you in regard to your children. If you set them an example of wickedness, how can you be freed from the charge of cruelty towards them? “They ask of you bread, and you give them a stone.” You hurt their souls, while you feed and clothe their bodies. Beware that you be not partakers of their sins. See that you behave yourselves wisely towards them—see that you preserve good temper with

them, and that they learn no evil ways from you.

Teach them the knowledge of God at home ; talk to them of the importance and necessity of religion, both to yourselves and to them. Explain to them the uses of learning, both human and divine. Teach them the benefits of obedience and submission to the powers that be, to the king and to all that are put in authority under him. Remember, that if your children do not learn good from you, they will learn evil. Children are peculiarly creatures of imitation, the sentiments which they utter are frequently an echo of those which they have repeatedly heard from their parents.

Pray for your children, that God would give them his Holy Spirit—yea, pray with them. It is the duty of parents to pray for their children : what then shall we say to you who do not pray for yourselves ? How can you be heard when you pray for your children ? The godly

parent may indeed hope to be heard ;  
“ For the effectual fervent prayer of a  
righteous man availeth much.”

3. To Christians who do not sustain  
the office of parents.

You have large duties to perform towards children—you are bound to do them all the good you can. There are but few more numerous, more difficult, or more necessary duties, than those which Christians, in general, owe to children. They are ignorant ; as you have opportunity, you are bound to provide means for their instruction. They need line upon line, and precept upon precept, that they may learn to fear the Lord, and you must not neglect to bear a part of the burden of teaching them. It is your duty to pray for children, that God would be pleased to convert them, while they are young. You owe also an approving look, and a word of encouragement to those families, who make endeavours to bring up their children in the fear of the

**Lord.** See that you make much of them that fear the Lord ; and let your prayers be united with ours, “ that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, and that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.”



## LECTURE II.

ADDRESSED TO THOSE IN EARLY YOUTH.

(*Second Sunday in Lent.*)

LUKE xv. 21.

“ And the Son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

THE parable, of which the text forms a part, is full of instruction, especially to youth. In it we discover, that “the pleasures of sin are but for a season ;”—the early shame and degradation which follow youthful transgressions,—the dreadful state to which they often reduce themselves, before they come to any wise reflection,—the reckless measures they adopt in order to secure present gratifications,—their total forgetfulness, that

“ short hours of joy, and years of pain,” attend every deviation from a virtuous life. We see, in the Prodigal Son, the danger youth are in from a proud heart, and from habits of dissipation and excess. We see the folly of refusing to return into the ways of virtue and religion, on the first rebukes of God in his providential dealings toward them—the sin of hating to be reproved and of refusing to bear chastisement from the good and virtuous part of mankind. We further see, in the case of the Prodigal Son, that the chief difficulty which youthful offenders have in returning to the paths of religion and virtue, is in themselves. Sin and guilt fill them with distrust towards the authors of their being—so strangely do they miscalculate a parent’s heart. The point is important to be noted both by parents and children: “ And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion,

and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

These particulars in the parable are highly valuable, and very important to be understood by all. To-day, however, we have chiefly to do with youth. We come to call youth to repentance. The Lord Jesus spake this parable, that it might remain as a memorial of his sentiments respecting what the world call the gaieties of youth; but which are in reality vices, which call for immediate correction. These, alas! are frequently viewed with indulgence; they grow with the growth of the body, and strengthen with the strength of the various faculties of the soul; so that man, through the influence of his sinful habits, becomes "like the deaf adder, which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely."

The season of youth follows that of childhood and terminates with manhood. It is that period in human life, when the body thrives more rapidly, and strengthens

itself, till it grows to its full stature. It is the time when the faculties of the mind, especially those prompted by curiosity—perception, imitation, and memory, are most powerful.

My dear young friends, youth is with you the season of hope and high expectation; but with your parents and guardians, it is a time of fear and anxiety. Let parents speak to youth, and urge upon them the duty of attending upon the worship of God with seriousness and devotion. Levity is one of the great snares of youth. Let me warn you against indulging in a light and trifling spirit. Whenever you read your Bibles, be serious; when you pray to God, be serious; when you attend public worship and the hearing of sermons, be serious. Solomon gives this sound advice to you; “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they consider not that they do evil.”

In considering the subject of repentance as incumbent upon youth, who have given no decisive evidences of conversion, we beg you to observe, 1st, your real characters in the estimation of God, and hence your need of repentance; 2ndly, the benefits which may be derived from the confession of your sins.

I. We beg you to observe your real characters in the estimation of God, and hence your need of repentance,

You heard in the preceding lecture, what God thought of your character and conduct when you were children, apart from the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." How have you differed from these? Have your childhood and youth been marked with a regard to religion, which has distinguished you from the generality of the children in the village or the neighbourhood where you live? This must be the case,



unless we could suppose, that the greater number of children, as they grow up to become young men and women, show by their lives that they are converted. Do you reckon yourselves to have no need of repentance toward God, and contrition of heart, for the sin of your nature, and the sins of your life? If you judge yourselves by the perfect law of God, you will confess, "Our youth is stained with many crimes." Those who are pure in their own eyes, would tell us, they need no repentance, because they are as good as others. But you will do well to remember, that the words of Christ are equally true as they regard youth, as when they are applied to men advanced in life. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Are you, my young friends, keeping company with the many,

or the few? Do you think with the many, or the few? Do you adopt the opinions of the majority, as to the place which religion should occupy in the minds of youth? Do you entertain a love to religion, to the Bible, to prayer to God, and to the way in which good christian families live, like the virtuous youth of whom you read in sacred and profane history, or like the thoughtless multitude? Do you in your outward conduct imitate them, or do you rather follow the giddy multitude, and do some things, which you know to be evil, and others, about which you are afraid to inquire lest you should find them to be forbidden, and this, because you have no resolution to forsake them?

You are not at liberty to view religion as a matter of indifference; you must have it, or you cannot be either safe or happy; and in order to attain it, you must have repentance. "Repent ye and believe the Gospel;" this not only contains a solemn command, but it prescribes the

order in which the two chief parts of personal religion must be sought. You are in danger of losing all the advantages you have obtained by the sacrament of baptism, and of falling under the displeasure of God. Let us reason over this important subject, for religion is consonant to right reason, and suited to promote your permanent happiness.

You are a young man, one of those who have received a better education than the poor can obtain: you have had the discipline and training, which the nurseries of religious and useful learning provide. You have read some part of the Bible. You have not learned the bad habits which are too often contracted before boys leave school—you have not offended your parents, nor disappointed their reasonable expectations respecting you.

Young persons, especially young men, under such circumstances, may think they have no need of repentance toward God;



they may suppose that they have no great occasion to take up the resolution of the Prodigal in the parable connected with the text, and apply it to God their heavenly Father. "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Before you determine too hastily, think what has been the state of your mind toward God all this time. "God looketh at the heart." Have you loved God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, with the love they deserved from you? Perhaps you have not cared to become more intimately acquainted with the ministers of religion. You have been afraid lest they should speak to you on the subject of your baptismal vows and promises, or lest they should put to you such questions, as would lead you to betray a culpable ignorance of the chief articles of the christian religion.

Have you not been brought under the dominion of some sins, called by St. Paul the works of the flesh? (Gal. v. 19, &c.) Those who live in the frequent practice of any sins, are said to be “tied, and bound with the chain of their sins:” these are, alas! willing captives. They are full of guilt, suspicion, anxiety, and fear—yea, also of aversion from those ministers of religion and godly persons who would assist them to flee from the wrath to come. O my young friends, do not trifle in such circumstances, lest your habits of sin become inveterate; and when God proceeds to reckon with you for your negligences and ignorances, you be like Esau, who “found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

There may be others among you, who do not rise so high in the scale of morals and religious knowledge as the young men to whom we have alluded.

You, alas ! learned but little of your duty either toward God, or toward your neighbour, when you were children. You early withdrew yourselves from restraint, and discipline, and learning. How many of this class of young men are found in the lower walks of life ! A great number of the young men who are manufacturers, and mechanics, as well as those employed in agriculture, rise no higher in religious knowledge and practice. The disorderly and immoral conduct of young men, disturbs the quiet of the Sabbath-day in our towns and villages ; they even interrupt the solemnity of divine worship, at one time, by their levity and rudeness, and at another, by their drowsiness and slumbers.

Alas ! if these words reach the ears of any such, let us warn you of your danger, in that you have joined company with the sons of Belial. Sin and misrule have taken hold of you ; you have become, as it were, traders in evil. We call upon

you this day to repent; and, blessed be God, there is repentance for you, if you will now do no more wickedly—if you will hearken unto counsel and be wise. “Take with you words and turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you.”

But we turn to the young females who form a most important moiety of the rising generation. Let us suppose we address a respectable young woman. Perhaps, you say, My parents speak well of me—my relations love me, and my own heart does not condemn me, as having been wicked. I have no thought that God is angry with me, for if ever I did wrong, I was sorry for it afterwards. When I was at school, I said my prayers, and learned my catechism, and though I do not read my Bible as often as I should do, nor say my prayers so regularly as I used to do when I was younger, when I am settled in life I shall be better disposed to these things. If we tell such that they are in



great danger of losing their souls, and that God is angry with them, they think we are harsh and unjust.

This is the way in which many young women endeavour to satisfy themselves, that they need not repentance. You may indeed have all the virtues you presume upon; you may be superior to others as it regards exemption from evil propensities, yet, you must remember, that God requires truth in the inward parts.

When you were baptized, you “promised, by your sureties, to renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh.” Have you fulfilled this vow and promise? You acknowledge in your catechism, that you are commanded by the Lord, “to submit yourselves to all your governors, spiritual pastors, and masters:” have you done so? When you were invited to go to your minister for instruction, preparatory to con-



firmation, did you obey the call? Must not one, and another answer, no, to these questions? Then you have been disobedient to your best earthly benefactors. Others may be able to say, we were confirmed when we were young. Did you, after confirmation, seek a due preparation of heart, that you might come to the sacrament of the supper of the Lord. If you deemed yourselves to be unfit, did you seek to be made fit? Did you try any means which were recommended to you, that you might draw near to the holy communion in the exercise of faith, hope, and charity? Did you not rather begin to make excuses for delaying to offer up yourselves to the Lord? Then your hearts deceived you, and you became hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Sin became more familiar to you, religion and prayer more irksome, till, at length, it may be, you have left off prayer and the practice of religion.

If these be any thing like the circum-

stances in which you are found, you are accounted by God as enemies to him—as despisers of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as those that resist the Holy Ghost; and unless you repent of your sin in making light of Christ, and in not seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, you must perish. The invitation of the gospel is, however, graciously continued to you, “Be ye reconciled unto God.”

Take another case; suppose you are a daughter of parents, who have some fear of God. You are not able to say, you never gave your father or mother any uneasiness. You were perhaps obstinate, and indulged in bad tempers when you were younger, and as you advanced in years, you became headstrong and impatient of controul—you have felt more pleasure in the company of those who laugh at serious piety, than in the company of those who fear the Lord. As for the Bible, and secret prayer, and self-exami-

nation, you have neglected them. Alas ! you are dead in trespasses and sins ; you have in effect said unto God, “ Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” Godly ministers call upon you to repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out ; for you are joined to idols which you have set up in your heart.

Most young persons who are not living in the daily exercise of repentance, may be ranged under these heads or classes of youth ; if so, then, we have proved that you are under the necessity of repenting of your sins and of confessing them unto the Lord. You must, my young friends, lay open your hearts unto the Lord in your prayers to him for mercy and salvation, through Jesus Christ. You must not content yourselves to confess some sins, and to hide others. You must not cover the deformity of sin from yourselves. You must trace up the sins that have appeared in your life, to the fault of

a corrupt and fallen nature, as David did, when he said, “ Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” You must in your confessions, feel, as well as say, “ Behold I am vile !” Each of you will be obliged to confess to the Lord in some such words as these ; “ I have been perfidious in my conduct towards the Lord—I have robbed God, I have wronged my own soul—I have abused my reason, and understanding, and conscience—I have tasted of forbidden pleasure or gain, after I knew it to be forbidden—I have, like Sampson, laid me down on the lap of pleasure, and have gone to sleep in sin—I have been overcome of evil, and have thence become guilty and fearful :—I have felt this to be true, that “ The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth, but the righteous is bold as a lion.” Then you must humble yourself, you must be content to accept of mercy and forgiveness on the terms of the gospel. You must receive pardon as a



free gift from God, without money and without price. You must account yourself as one of the chief of sinners. You must, with the Prodigal, be willing to be saved among the most unworthy: "make me as one of thy hired servants."

You must with all your heart aim and purpose to have done with sin; you must be unwilling to leave any root of it in your hearts. These are hard sayings to those who have no deep and abiding persuasions of their entire need of mercy and salvation. No man can thus turn unto Christ, unless he be taught by the Holy Ghost. Reformation of some outward parts of a person's conduct may be made by the force of moral persuasion, but the heart will remain as it was before. For this entire change, you must cry as David did, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Those who think to do less than this will deceive themselves, as persons having



only a form of godliness: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" You cannot hope for a cure, without being made sensible of your disease, and longing to be healed. May each of you have to say respecting yourselves in this matter, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquities of my sin."

II. We proceed to consider the great benefits of confession of sin.

1. It affords an evidence of the sincerity of our hearts towards God. Those who are under the dominion of sin, endeavour to impose upon God. They confess some sins, they deny others; they treat the character of their actions with partiality; though they allow, they design no good by what they do, they deny that they are to be blamed for this. If they disobey some commandments of God, they think to excuse themselves from guilt, by professing to do more than

they are required by God, in other respects. But if a young person says, I will confess all my sins, I will offer no excuse, I will not lessen my offences, though they render me vile in my own eyes, then he ventures to treat God with confidence, and he may hope that the greatness of his sins will not prevent him from obtaining mercy through Jesus Christ. He may indeed draw an argument from this very circumstance, as David did, saying, "O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great."

2. The full confession of your sin will tend to destroy the dominion of sin over you.

When you have, with tears, confessed those sins to which you may be inclined by your nature, and tempted to by Satan, you will be better able to resist them. You may, by the help of the Lord, be able to say, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Then, "God will not suffer you to be tempted

above that you are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it."

3. Another great benefit of the confession of your sins to God, is, that it brings you into the order, which God has appointed, in which he will bestow spiritual blessings upon sinners of mankind. He first causes sinners to feel their wounds, then he pours into them, as it were, "oil and wine." He will have all true penitents to sow in tears, before they reap in joy. Tears accompany the first breathings of the new life of grace in the soul. These tears of sorrow for sin will, however, be quickly followed by those of joy. "Weeping," says the divine Psalmist, "may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

1st. The first of these blessings, is a good hope of pardon and acceptance with God, through Jesus Christ. This hope is weak in some, strong in others. It rises to confidence in some, in others it

seldom reaches beyond a "peradventure the Lord will look upon me in mercy at the last," will pardon me, and save me from the wrath to come. Yet, in its feeblest exercises, it is a hope, which is as "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that which is within the veil." (Heb. vi. 19.) It has been well observed, that the ship is drawn to the place where the anchor rests, and that the anchor is not drawn by means of the cable, in the first instance, to the ship: so all who believe in Jesus Christ will be drawn to heaven where he, who is their hope, is.

2nd. By confession of sins to God through Jesus Christ, the comforts of the Holy Spirit are bestowed upon Christians. We cannot indeed tell the exact mode in which the Holy Spirit comforts the hearts and minds of those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, yet the fact is certain. There are other things in which our knowledge fails us. We should be much at a loss,



if we were obliged to explain how the fire warms us, or water allays our thirst, yet we experience the result in either case as certain and uniform. All who turn to God by repentance, faith, and confession of sin, receive the Holy Spirit. He dwells in Christians; and his presence makes the soul a little heaven. Guilt is removed, and our comfort in attending upon the service of God is augmented. The duties of private prayer, and the reading of the Scriptures, yield happiness to the mind. There is joy experienced in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and a fear lest he should leave us. "Take not thy Holy Spirit from us."

The necessity of repentance and confession of sins has been set before you, my young friends; the nature and extent of true confession of sins to God, and some benefits which result to those who perform these things. Let us entreat you to "remember your Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come



not, nor the years draw nigh in the which you shall say, you have no pleasure in them."

1. To you who have not thought seriously of the duty of repentance, the subject is one, which involves great interests. "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." If you refuse to repent because you are young, it may be, that you shall die before you advance beyond this period, and then where will your portion be? Are you one of the tender sex, who seek for short-lived pleasure? St. Paul tells you, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." There are no lasting pleasures comparable to those of religion.

Are you a young man full of expectations of satisfaction from sensual enjoyment, and ready to break those bonds by which God has tied you to self-denial and patient labour? Hear the call of the wise man, Solomon, to you; "Rejoice, O young

man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore," &c.

2. We would address you who fear to run into extremes on this subject.

You wish to be moderate in religion; this plausible desire, however, may become a snare to you. Religion is compared to the possession of riches, and health, and friends, and long life, and honours; but in these you have no fear that you should have any excess. Why then should you fear to have too much of repentance, or faith, or holiness? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and soul, and strength," is God's commandment, and you cannot exceed this.

3. To those young persons who have begun to confess their sins unto the Lord, we would address a few words of encou-

ragement. You have done well to begin thus early in the great business for which you were created. You may regret that you did not begin earlier to seek the God of your fathers; but you have reason to be thankful that you have begun. Now you are in the way to attain true happiness, God has become your God, Christ has become your Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit your guide and Comforter. The fashion of this world will quickly pass away. The judgment of Solomon will be found true as to the satisfaction which can be derived from creatures, except as they are used for the glory of God and the benefit of our fellow creatures. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." "Childhood and youth are vanity." "Yea, more; the estimate of every sublunary thing is vanity." "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity." But you have a goodly portion in the possession of repentance toward God, and faith toward

our Lord Jesus Christ. Follow the steps of those pious youths whose story you have read, and, like them, through the mercy of God, your last end shall be peace.

## LECTURE III.

ADDRESSED TO THOSE IN EARLY MANHOOD.

*(Third Sunday in Lent.)*

ACTS IX. 4, 5.

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

THE man to whom Jesus Christ calls in the text, had come to the age of those persons whom we intend to address in our present discourse. He had arrived at man's estate: he had left the Jewish schools, in which he had been educated, for he “was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel;” and he was now entering upon the calling for which he had been trained by previous discipline. He was zealous



for the religion of his forefathers, and jealous of those who did not strictly adhere to the ceremonies imposed upon its votaries. No one could dispute his moral conduct, since he was, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." How few attain to manhood with a character so reputable as that of Saul! Yet even he, had need of repentance; he was called upon to give an account of himself as a persecutor of Christ, in the person of his followers: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Alas! how many such persons there are, who when they begin to act for themselves in life, at the same time begin to persecute some of the ministers of the gospel of Christ, and endeavour to compel one or other of their acquaintance to forsake the paths of religion, and to blaspheme that worthy name by which they are called! Not a few, in early life, become obnoxious to the woe denounced by the Saviour. "Woe to the world because of offences,

for it must needs be that offences come : but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." If it be asked, against whom is the offence done which Christ resents ? he himself furnishes the answer : " But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." It is a lamentable truth, that there are in every age, and in many places, persons, but lately come of age, who hate the light of divine truth, " neither come to the light, lest they should be reprov'd." Some, who have riches, instead of employing them to promote the piety of their fellow-creatures, become opposers of the ministers and professors of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The spirit of persecution exhibits itself in various ways. There is frequently a persecution of sentiment ; there is a persecution carried on by the tongue, the eye, and the countenance,

which grieves some, and distresses others, and hinders not a few from entering into the kingdom of heaven. There is frequently a withdrawment of the confidence and assistance, which are necessary to give full effect to measures for the discouragement of evil, and for promoting the moral and spiritual good of a parish or neighbourhood.

Let those pause, who have lived from twenty to thirty years in the world, before they say, We have never hindered the gospel of Christ—we never persuaded any to put off religion—we never spoke against our spiritual pastor, because his words reprov'd us;—we never withheld our countenance from him in his efforts to promote religion, a greater attention to the duties of public worship, and the observance of the Lord's day. Many have done injury to the interests of religion, by slighting those who were truly religious, and by speaking evil of the people who professed serious piety. It

is possible that some of you may have done much mischief by your example, in misusing the sabbath-day, and in neglecting the church, into the society of which you were baptized. And if you have not to lament over a mistaken zeal, which induced St. Paul, before his conversion, to hale men and women to prison, who were determined to profess the name of Jesus Christ, you must not, presently, conclude yourselves to be innocent in this particular. You ought rather to be thankful that the usages of society, and the temper of the times, have rendered your aversion to the servants of Christ less offensive and injurious to them, than it would otherwise have been. And though most of you may be able to say, that you have not, to an alarming extent, employed your tongues in speaking against religion and the disciples of Jesus Christ; yet you may be numbered by God, who sees your hearts, among those who neither “enter into the kingdom of hea-



ven, nor do they suffer those to go in who are entering."

A serious responsibility lies upon you, who have passed through childhood and youth, and have not yet given your hearts to God, "in whom you live, and move, and have your being;"—to the Lord Jesus Christ who has died for you and risen again—and to the Holy Spirit, whose influences, and warnings, and drawings, you have resisted.

To you the words of Jesus Christ apply, (Rev. iii. 20,) "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Let those who are entering upon life, consider this. You do not openly revile religion, nor persecute its followers; but you slight its divine Founder, and give a preference to present things, though he has said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."



You think you shall be able to do without religion for the present ; you therefore make excuses, as those did who were invited to the feast : “ I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it : I pray thee have me excused : ” or, “ I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them : ” or, “ I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. ” Thus you have your urgent business, or your intoxicating pleasure, which induces you to put off religion and the salvation of your soul to a more convenient season. It is a presumptuous sin to neglect the great salvation of God. There is guilt charged upon those who omit to perform the commandments of God, as well as upon those who break the positive precepts of God’s law. “ They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies. ” You cannot indeed be too careful in consulting your own interests. Solomon gives to each of you this important assurance—“ If thou be

wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." Be careful to learn what is your true interest. Surely it is the true interest of every one, to have the love of God, and the grace of Christ, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, as his portion *now*; and, in the world to come, everlasting life."

If you neglect this, your true interest, you are foolish and disobedient. Let those who have entered upon the period of life, when the body has attained its full strength, and the faculties of the soul have become vigorous, beware, that they do not attempt to sail over the stormy sea of life in any other vessel, "than the ark of Christ's church," lest they make shipwreck, and lose their all. Probably there were many who had boats and rafts, when God sent a flood of waters upon the earth, yet these did not secure them from the waters above, and the floods below; they were all drowned,

only Noah and his family were saved in the ark from perishing by water. Through their neglect of Noah's preaching, they perished, and their spirits are now in prison. They lost their lives in this world, and the favour of God for ever. You are in danger of doing the same. Now the tide of health flows high, but soon it may ebb out into sickness and mortal disease.

Take warning, if you are tempted to go on in life without religion. "The way of transgressors is hard." You will do yourselves harm—you will not attain happiness, by refusing to obey the ministers of Christ, the gospel of Christ, and the Spirit of God. "The Spirit, and the bride say, come—and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the waters of life freely." "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

Let the voice of experience be heard; take warning by those, who were once like you, but are now advanced to riper years. They began by "making provi-

sion for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof:" they anxiously inquired, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" They promised to themselves a perpetuity of the means of enjoyment; "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant;" "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," allured their senses, filled their hearts, and blinded their minds, so that they were "led captive by Satan at his will."

Poverty, as an armed man, has overtaken some of these; the streams of luxury have failed like the waters from the summer's brook: they pine in want of many of the comforts, and some of the necessities of life. Not a few have lost their health, after wasting their substance in riotous living. Some are twice dead, their consciences seem to be seared as with a hot iron. Some are haters of God, who "live in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another."



Learn of those who sought not the Lord in the early part of manhood. These were once like many of you, unmarried, and unfettered with children, but they ventured to form connexions in life, without acknowledging God in all their ways. They have, however, at length begun to seek the Lord; they have found a place of repentance—they ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward—they come with weeping and with supplication to the throne of grace, and to the assembly of God's saints—they long to appear before the Lord, as his long-tried servants do—they are ready to say with Job, “O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come, even unto his seat; then would I order my cause before him, I would fill my mouth with arguments.”

Do you suppose that these persons who neglected religion in early life, though they now possess a good hope of obtaining salvation, through Jesus Christ, have lost nothing by delaying their repent-



ance? They would, if it were prudent to confess their faults, tell you that they have lost much. "The bones of some are full of the sin of their youth, which shall lie down with them in the dust." Some are "unequally yoked with unbelievers;" they have husbands who fear not God, whose habits and conduct are either a snare or a torment to them. Others have wives who have no personal religion to soften their tempers, and to impart to them "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," "that they may love their husband, love their children, be discreet, chaste, keepers at home;" and "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Indeed, with many, the house is divided against itself, the children are "sons of Belial;" masters and mistresses live in fear of their servants; and parents, who have, in after life, begun religion, too frequently see their children forming friendships with those who fear not God, nor obey the

gospel of Jesus Christ. The history of delayed repentances presents many a sad roll of social, and domestic, and personal sorrow, which, like that seen by Ezekiel, is "written within and without," "lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

Let these instances of God's retributive justice warn you who are yet unfettered, nor have come into voluntary connexion with those who studiously exclude God and religion from their houses. Are you raised above want, and tempted to taste the cup of pleasure? Beware! lest poison lurk therein. Do the children of folly solicit you to become their companions? "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." If you have deviated from the straight path of religion, say not, "I have followed idols, and after them will I go." Repent of your sin: begin this day to seek the God of your fathers, and walk in the ways of good men. "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil," "for it shall be well with them that fear the Lord."

The necessity of repentance to females at this important season of life, cannot be concealed. Let them also hearken unto counsel and be wise. Let them not presently envy those who seem to have attained their utmost wishes in the marriage state. If they are living without God in the world, they are not happy, and they are in danger of being driven away in their wickedness, when sickness comes. Those, who live in such close intimacy as that of the marriage state, must soon discover whether their minds are alike disposed towards God. If there is any difference in sentiment, and spirit, and feeling here, there will be a root of bitterness to trouble domestic concord; for "how can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Does all seem smooth as the surface of the tranquil sea? Like that, the peace of the wicked who repent not, will soon be disturbed. "Look to the end of things," and you will have less reason to be dissatisfied with the lot which God has assign-

ed to you, who have acknowledged him in all your ways. The further any persons go on in life without repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater is their danger and the more certain their misery. They reason foolishly who conclude, that religion will lessen any innocent enjoyment of life; and they mistake, who suppose, that pure religion deprives Christians of the proper solaces which God has graciously bestowed upon them during the time of "their vanity upon the earth."

If you are such persons, as the world esteems virtuous, the people of the world will not wish to lose you; the companions of your youth will desire to have you as their friends in riper years. But if the opinions of those who solicit your confidence are less in accordance with the Bible than they were in early life; if they themselves are less strict in keeping the sabbath day holy—in short, if they recede from, rather than approximate to



religion, you must “forsake the foolish and live.” The Scripture commands you not to conceal your religion; “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord of hosts.” You have much to secure, your present opportunity must not be slighted. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found;” “for now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”

Hitherto, we have supposed the persons, whom we have called to repentance, to have been generally correct in their morals, that no habit of vice has been contracted by them, which has cast a blot upon their reputation, or spread a cloud of guilt and shame over them. But when we exhort numbers to repentance and newness of life, who have passed through more than twenty years, exposed to the temptations of a corrupt and fallen nature, to the seductions of a flatter-



ing world, and to the subtle devices of Satan, we must fear that some have contracted evil habits; and besides the ordinary neglect of God and religion, have also fallen into outward sins. They may have been vicious, or profane persons, “as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” Perhaps their names have, with virtuous indignation, been cast out as evil—perhaps they have, more than once or twice, added drunkenness to their other crimes—perhaps they have been guilty of fraud or theft—perhaps they have run into debt, without the means, or the reasonable prospect of being able to pay their creditors—perhaps some cannot obtain from the virtuous and respectable part of the society in which they live, a good character for sobriety, quietness, and industry. Their youth has been stained with many crimes, they “have walked in the counsel of the ungodly, and stood in the way of sinners;” but if such characters are found among

you, we call upon them in the name of the Lord, to "repent and believe the gospel." The Lord himself saith, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Though you have rebelled against God's law, and offended good men, and outraged the feelings of the respectable part of the community, yet you are invited to repentance. Though you "have wasted your father, and chased away your mother," yet even now, if you confess and forsake your sins, you shall obtain mercy from God, for "there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared."

Keep the sabbath-day holy; read the Bible, learn to converse with yourselves. Pray to God to give you eyes, to see your real condition in his sight. The discovery will alarm you, the burden of your sins will oppress you; but in this way

you will be brought to mourn for sin, and to cry to God for pardon. You will be brought to welcome the invitation of Jesus Christ, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you; take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Come to Jesus Christ with sorrow for sin, with humble faith in his merits, and death, and intercession, who "died for the sins of the whole world." Come to him in faith, who has said, "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out."

You are addressed as distinguishable into several classes, that if any think themselves innocent before men, they may not presume that they have no need of repentance. Such have need to be reminded, that they must meet the eyes of a heart-searching God, before whom "all things are naked and opened." Thus remembering that their secret sins are known

unto God, they may with shame and sorrow confess them to him, and with faith and humility seek for the pardoning grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

Those persons know but little of themselves, who do not feel the necessity of the petition affixed to every one of the commandments in the Liturgy, “ Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.”

If you have not broken all the commandments of God, in the letter of them, you have broken so many of them, as to be “ guilty of all.” You must suffer the curse, which God has pronounced against those who break his law, unless you have Christ to bear the curse for you, and who, by his obedience unto death, “ magnified the law and made it honourable.”

Let those who esteem themselves most worthy, beware, lest they venture to hope for heaven in any other way, than through



faith in the name of Jesus Christ. This was the sin of many in the days of the Apostles: it was the sin of him whom Jesus addresses in the text, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

It was the sin of the Jews generally, "for they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." You may possibly err here, and thus fail of obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is to be feared, that many have credit given them for knowledge on the subject of religion, which they do not possess. They are supposed to know the meaning of the laws of God; but they have no conscience of sin, from the breach of them. They repeat the name of God in ordinary conversation, without any fear of his majesty; and when they are angry, their mouths are filled with cursing and bitterness. They take almost every



liberty with the sabbath-day. In it they transact business, take their pleasure, and journey from place to place, whenever it suits their inclination or convenience. Such persons, often neglect the public worship of God, or come into his house at any period during the time that prayer is offered up to God, in the name of Jesus Christ.

How blind are the minds of many, who are grown up to man's estate! They shudder at the thought of breaking the sixth, or seventh, or the eighth, commandment, but they take great liberties with the third and the fourth. Let such know, that they have broken the divine law, that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" against them, and that "if they repent not, they must all likewise perish." They cannot be saved, unless they flee "for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them in the gospel." "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the

name of Jesus." He invites, but you refuse; shall this always be so? Beware, "lest God swear in his wrath, that you shall not enter into his rest." You will find it a greater crime to refuse the mercy of Christ, who is ready to save you, than to have done many sins, while in a state of ignorance, and without the means of grace.

Have you no repentings kindled in your breasts? Will you still refuse godliness, which has the "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come?" Do you choose the pleasures of sin, which will be quickly followed by remorse, and guilt, and fear? The hour of sickness will come, beware lest it overtake you suddenly. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Let the prophet be heard.

“Tremble, ye women that are at ease: be troubled, ye careless ones.” “What is your life? It is but a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

#### APPLICATION.

##### I. To those in authority.

If you have influence, take heed how you employ it: you may be helpers of the faith and piety of those who are under you, or you may greatly retard the faith and piety of many. Consider how sacred is the trust committed to you, and how fearful the responsibility under which you lie for the use you make of it. Christ has said, “Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.” Let it, therefore, be your first care, to repent yourselves, and then to assist the repentance of those placed under you.

2. To those persons who have hitherto been careless.

Remember, God is serious who calls you to repentance: the ministers of religion are serious who warn you to flee from the wrath to come: sickness and death will be found serious matters whenever they overtake you. Judgment and tormenting fire, prepared for the wicked, are terrible realities.

When you are hearing sermons be serious and thoughtful. Be earnest in prayer to God, through Jesus Christ, that he would give you his Holy Spirit, "that you, worthily lamenting your sins, and acknowledging your wretchedness, may obtain from the God of all grace perfect remission and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

3. To those who profess themselves to be the disciples of Christ.

This is a season which requires of you much prayer to God, through Jesus Christ, for the increase of true religion in

the world ; and especially in the church of which you are members. Those persons between the ages of twenty and thirty years need your prayers. They are capable of doing much harm if they continue in impenitence, and they are able to effect much good if they are turned unto the Lord. Under these circumstances it is your duty to pray that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, in the conversion of many who are in the prime of life, which may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



## LECTURE IV.

ADDRESSED TO THOSE IN THE PRIME OF  
LIFE.

(*Fourth Sunday in Lent.*)

HEB. IV. 7.

“Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To-day, after so long a time ; as it is said, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

THE persons for whose benefit this discourse is chiefly intended, have entered upon the most important period of human life. They have passed nearly half the days of man ; “the days of our years are threescore years and ten.” Childhood and youth, have, by these, been estimated at their just value ; and they judge the saying of Solomon to be true, “that childhood and youth are vanity.” Persons

advanced so far in life, have seen many of those who entered the world about the same time with themselves, laid in the grave, where they have become the food of worms. They who survive, are placed in far different circumstances from those in which they expected to be placed. The buoyancy and hilarity of youth are gone from them. The keen appetite which rendered less palatable food grateful, and "every bitter thing sweet to them," is but seldom felt. The changes of the seasons, the cold of winter, and the heat of summer, more sensibly affect their bodies.

But how are their minds affected? Some, perhaps, fret and vex themselves, because their families are become a burden to them, or their means of sustenance are diminished. They find it difficult to provide food and raiment for themselves and for their children; and they plead these cares as an excuse for neglecting "the one thing needful," the salvation of their souls.

Persons of both sexes may have passed to this period of human life, without taking one right step toward entering into the kingdom of heaven. If this be so, how many are the sins of those who have arrived to this age, and yet have not begun with religion! There is a catalogue of sins of disobedience to commandments, concerning things, which we cannot omit without incurring great guilt. Such as these, "Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day." "Honour thy father and thy mother." Or to speak more comprehensively, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." The duties, which every one, who has not learned to live godly in Christ Jesus, has left undone, through so many years, must appear to every enlightened mind to make his sins to be innumerable. When the pious Psalmist contemplated this, he asks, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

There is another view in which those who, without possessing personal religion, have come to this period of life, should contemplate themselves. They have settled into some habits which make godliness now, a more difficult thing to practise without suspicion of hypocrisy, than it would have been, if "they had borne the yoke of Christ in their youth." The force of sinful habits is not easily perceived, by those who have indulged in them, until they begin to make attempts to shake them off. Even the pride of not changing opinions, which men have once expressed, helps to keep them from repentance. And the knowledge that much moral discipline will be requisite, makes them shun the thoughts of turning to the Lord, as a thing that could in nowise be submitted to, without the most urgent necessity; they, therefore, propose to put off repentance, until they fall into mortal sickness. Great ignorance of religion prevails in some minds, and also pride,



lest that ignorance should be discovered by others: hence men shun conversation with intelligent Christians, lest it should lead to any personal inquiry respecting their knowledge of the doctrines and duties of the Bible. How deplorably ignorant are many persons, upon the subject of religion, who are otherwise well-educated! If childhood and youth have been neglected, maturer years do not, without great labour, and a real change of heart, add such knowledge of religion as will humble the hearts of those advanced to riper years, and make them bow to the sceptre of divine grace.

When persons at this age have been some time united in marriage, if a thought enters into the heart of one of them, that in reference to another world, all is wrong with them, that God and religion have been neglected, and that they are in great danger of perishing everlastingly; will not a husband or a wife endeavour by every means to allay such



fears, lest domestic peace should be disturbed? If there be children in the family, a false shame lest they should witness serious piety in the parents when separated from each other, will serve to deter some fathers and mothers from kneeling down to prayer, if not from reading the Bible and books of religious instruction.

Such hindrances to repentance are felt by persons who are strictly moral, but there are not a few of those who have passed half their lives, whom the searchings of heart which religion induces would not compel to cry out, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!" or if we were to speak to them of the sins and crimes of many who have passed through the states of life in which they have been, one or other of them would be ready to enter into the feelings of the woman of Samaria, who said, "Come see a man who told me all that ever I did." Alas! my sin is known.

This is the season of life, when those who have had some religious instruction in the time of youth, more decidedly show the use they will make of it. Not unfrequently, the vows which they made in childhood and in youth, must be paid unto the Lord. Some who have been blessed with religious parents, did, perhaps, in a time of trouble or sickness, like Jacob, make their promises unto the Lord. (Gen. xxviii. 20, 21.) "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." Whatever be the lawful promises which we make to God, he expects that we should perform them, when we come into circumstances which afford us an opportunity of so doing. The vow of Jacob was required of him: and you have the vows of God upon you, which, at least some of you made to God, either in early life, or in

some season of sickness and trial. Yea, you have, in effect, “vowed and promised to renounce the devil and all his works,” “to believe all the articles of the christian faith,” and “to keep God’s holy will and commandments.” Let such remember, that “God hath no pleasure in fools, but let them pay that they have vowed.”

Some, indeed, cast off the form and profession of religion, at the time when they are bound, by every tie of obedience to God, and gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ, to give it their countenance. When a truly pious man, like Joshua, would say, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;” they forsake the assembling of themselves together for the purpose of public worship on the sabbath-day; their families are not taught by precept and example to remember to keep holy that sacred day; nor do they, on ordinary days, give religious instruction to their households, and use family prayer. When the Almighty has, in his good

providence, preserved men and women, to live out half the span of human existence, a mighty debt of gratitude and obedience is due from them to him. When, in addition to this, he has placed and settled them in some calling, by which they may, with his blessing, acquire the necessaries of life ; and when, also, in some cases, he has joined them in marriage, and given to them children, which are “ an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord ;”—in all such cases, the goodness of God is intended to lead men to repentance ; and returns of obedience and devotion to the Lord are looked for by him.

The frequent invitations, which persons grown up to man's estate in this christian land must have had from the ambassadors of Christ, “ to repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,” make continued disobedience to the heavenly call more sinful and wicked, than when their passions



were strong, and reason was weak. Of such disobedience some of you are guilty. Seeing then the long suffering of God has waited for you, how can you be addressed in language sufficiently strong to point out your aggravated sin in delaying the great work of your salvation any longer? If you have not yet begun the great business for which you were sent into the world, though you have lived out half the days of man, is there not something amiss in you? Are you not "feeding on ashes?" Has not "a deceived heart turned you aside?"

Do you still say, "Go your way for this time; when we have a convenient season we will call for you?" Do you still make excuses for delay? Do you plead that there are those older than yourselves, who continue to live in carelessness and pleasure? Well, be it so; "every man shall bear his own burden." They may not have had the warnings, or the instructions, which you have, or



minds equally capable of appreciating the doctrines and precepts contained in the Scriptures. But should they have possessed even more advantages than you, to learn the will of God; should they have had more calls to consider their ways and to turn unto the Lord; are you sure that they shall not shortly die? Are you sure that the commandment shall not go out from heaven against one or other of them, as against the barren fig-tree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Then would you stand in the place of that individual, who had not repented of sins committed against a holy God? "Look then to the end of things;" "how suddenly do they consume and perish!" "The end of the wicked is, that they shall be rooted out at the last:" do not, therefore, think to excuse yourselves on such a plea.

No one, who has any right views of the terrors of God's anger, or the advantages of his love in Christ Jesus to-

ward mankind, can look with indifference upon you who have not, during more than thirty years of your probation in this world, believed in Christ for the remission of sins. You are in the number of those who are "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds."

It is well to count the cost of religion before we claim its privileges, or enter upon its solemn duties. Religion has no occasion to shrink from such an investigation as this. You will do well, however, to consider, that when the blessings of salvation are proposed to you in the Gospel, and you are required to seek them in the way of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and by yielding yourselves to the guidance and instruction of the Holy Ghost; that you may learn to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this

present evil world; the question is not, whether you shall, by embracing religion, raise yourselves above a condition, safe and full of goodly prospects of enjoyments in this world, and after death, attain either unconsciousness of pain, or the possession of bliss not inferior to that which this world affords. Such an erroneous view, some take of their condition and circumstances in respect to God and religion. The real state of the case between those who have the gospel of Jesus Christ set before them, and God, the moral Governor of the world, who cannot look upon iniquity but with abhorrence, is this, that they are condemned already, both because they have broken the law of God, and because they have not obeyed the gospel. The men of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of the prophet Jonah, will rise up in judgment against such persons and condemn them.

All that separates an unconverted and rebellious mortal from that place which

is the beginning of torment prepared for the devil and his angels, is this frail body, which a fall might break as a potter's vessel—which a little heat might scorch to corruption—which a little cold might force to a reaction of fever—which a contact with impure air, or a fall into the water, might so impede in its movements, that the soul should be instantly dislodged from its clayey tenement, to return no more.

This view of the condition of unbelievers, the careless and disobedient refuse to take. If its truth were once admitted, it would spoil all their fancied joys, it would make the most tempting pleasures of sin bitter to them, to whom the intoxicating draught was offered. It would be like the sword of Damocles, which he beheld suspended over his head by a single hair. Men would anxiously inquire of the ministers of religion, "What must we do to be saved?"

Not a few, who refuse to repent and be-



lieve the gospel, endeavour to satisfy themselves by concluding that our statements of their danger are exaggerated, and thus harden their hearts against the terrors of the law, and the invitations of the gospel. This conclusion is by no means reasonable or true ; it serves, however, to show, that much practical unbelief exists in their hearts. They are ready to believe that the danger they are supposed to be in, is not in reality any danger, because it is not visible to their bodily eyes. Would they indeed tempt God to show his anger by some sudden stroke of his rod ? Would they have his hand take hold of judgment ? Let a person, with some light of divine truth in the understanding, be suddenly overtaken by sickness or accident, which threatens to terminate human life ; such a one will quickly see, that the danger is not imaginary. Private Christians, as well as ministers, at times go into the sick chambers of such persons. Behold,



they are full of tossings to and fro, because of their guilt. They are ready to conclude, that their sin has found them out; they can no longer persuade themselves that they shall have peace at the last, though they walk on still in the dark ways of sin and rebellion against God. One who well knew this says, "Thou, O Lord, hast set our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." "We consume away in thine anger, and are afraid at thy wrathful indignation." It is not, that under such circumstances, sin appears to be more sinful than it is; but now the man begins to feel his mortality—now the eyes of his mind are opened, which, before, were blinded by pride, carnal appetites, or other foolish and hurtful desires.

All who have arrived at this mature age, and have not repented at the preaching of the gospel, are in danger of God's anger. There needs no more aggravation of their sin and offence against

God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to justify God in taking vengeance upon them. "For he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." If, then, persons remain in unbelief and disobedience to the gospel, the question is not whether they shall perish, or enjoy the favour of God; but whether God shall close the season of their probation immediately, or he shall exercise his long-suffering toward them, until they have filled up the measure of their iniquities. The fearful instances of sudden death, which arrest the attention of men at certain times, are intended to admonish the less flagitious. Christ draws the moral, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Let all such as have not given glory to the Lord, and made confession of sins to him, reason out this matter. Let them not shut their eyes to the danger they are in of perishing everlastingly, and say,

“Peace, peace,” when God declares, “there is no peace to the wicked.” Do they say the danger is great, but it cannot be averted ; the past cannot be recalled. There is no hope. They are equally unwarranted in drawing such a conclusion, as in denying their guilt and danger. The inspired prophet testifies, that “there is mercy with the Lord, that he may be feared ;” the way in which a sinful creature can make his escape from the wrath to come, may not be seen so soon as his danger presents itself to him ; but if any one is truly desirous to put away his sin, and to embrace the salvation which God has, through his Son Jesus Christ, provided for the lost and the guilty ; the knowledge of the way of salvation will not be long withheld from such a one. The Spirit who has convinced of sin, and wrought the beginnings of repentance, will direct the penitent to the cross of Christ for pardon ; he will point to Jesus like John, who said, “Be-

hold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Such persons may well be afraid of relapsing into a careless and hardened state of mind, and of having their conscience seared as with a hot iron; but they should not be so anxious for immediate comfort and joy, as for a part in the love of God, in the pardoning mercy of Jesus Christ, and in the grace and comfort of the Holy Ghost.

There is not any good reason, why a truly penitent sinner should despair of God's mercy, through Christ, though he has lived out half his days in the service of sin and Satan, provided he does now, with sorrow and hearty repentance, seek unto God for his mercy, through the mediation of his Son. The command of Christ, and the promise of Christ, run parallel with each other; "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And Christ says further, for the encou-



ragement of penitents, “If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.”

Those who are called to repentance, have the promise of the Holy Spirit as a guide, to lead them to a knowledge of pardon and salvation. These, perhaps, they wish to obtain, but they would rather have them on some future day—in the period of mortal sickness, or at the hour of death. But a wish of this sort shows, very clearly, that men have no right apprehension of the present happiness which those enjoy who love and serve God; or they are without hope that their hearts could be brought into such a state, as to induce them to “choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” But this is an event which is not merely possible, but it will certainly be realised, by every one



who cometh unto God by Jesus Christ, and who is made a partaker of the Holy Ghost. What is it which makes persons incapable of loving God with all their heart? What is it which makes Jesus Christ to have “no form nor comeliness,” in their view? What is it which causes the life of a Christian to appear so undesirable, that men have no relish for the company and conversation of such an one? The cause is sin—sin in its guilt, and in its pollution, which has defiled the heart, and blinded the mind.

When, therefore, sin is removed, men form a right estimate of religion: then they will love God, and those who live according to his laws: then they will love the Holy Spirit, and those that are led by him: then they will love the Lord Jesus Christ, and those who diligently use his sacraments, and live agreeably to his precepts. “By this we know that we have passed from death unto life, be-

cause we love the brethren." Ask those who have learned to live godly in Christ Jesus, and they will tell you, that their happiness has not been lessened by the little piety they have obtained; they will inform you, that the more they strive after holiness, the nearer they approach to happiness, and true contentment. And this experience is that of the best of men; "Great peace have they which love thy law," says David, "and nothing shall offend them." "Godliness with contentment is great gain." Nor is this acquisition to be despaired of; "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Yea, St. Paul adds more, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

It is possible that another question may arise in the minds of those who are halting between two opinions, viz., whether their attainment of everlasting life, would, in reality, be rendered more certain than it is now, if they were from

this day to give themselves to the Lord. Some have put off religion to a time when sickness shall overtake them, on the plea, that it is better so to do, lest they should relapse into sin after grace received. Reasoning, however, of this sort proceeds from a mistaken view of the nature of personal religion, and of the character of God, whose children we become by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Until we repent and believe, according to the rule of the gospel, we are in a state of condemnation, and if death overtake us—and who shall say that it is not even at our doors?—we shall be utterly lost beyond the hope of escaping “the bitter pains of eternal death,” “the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.” But as soon as we look by faith to Jesus who died for us and rose again, we are pardoned—we are freed from condemnation, “our sins are blotted out,” “we are justified from all things from

which we could not be justified by the law of Moses."

The reality of all this is secured to them that believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, though the comfortable hope of it may not be given at the moment. This repentance and faith constitute that which is sometimes denominated "effectual calling," a very important link in the golden chain of salvation; for "whom God did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

There is the same essential difference between embracing religion now, and putting it off to a future and contingent season, as between certainty and uncertainty, safety and peril, present salvation and exposure to the wrath of an offended God. And will you leave the inheritance of heaven as a matter of uncertainty? Will you refuse present deliverance from the guilt and power of



sin, for the peradventure, that a more convenient season may come, when you may repent without inconvenience, and believe without an effort? “Be not deceived, God is not mocked,” such a time God does not warrant you to expect. “Now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent;” “for now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”

## LECTURE V.

ADDRESSED TO PERSONS ABOVE THE AGE OF  
FORTY YEARS.

*(Fifth Sunday in Lent.)*

LUKE XXI. 34, 35.

“ And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.”

THE persons, to whom this discourse is intended to apply, are those on whom the most important duties of civil and social life depend. But few people, in a highly cultivated state of society, are entrusted

with much power till they come to the age of forty years. Yet, how honourably soever men may discharge the duties of this life, they cannot be excused from preparing to enter upon a future state of existence. Those who have hitherto neglected the great subject of religion are called upon to consider the mercy they have abused, and the grace they have despised, that “they may hear and fear, and do no more wickedly.” Let such beware, lest they imitate the Israelites of old, to whom Moses speaks: “To-day, if ye will hear *his* voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” Well might St. Paul ask, “With whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned?”

If you have ventured hitherto along the dangerous path of life without religion, you cannot be excused of rashness and folly. You have turned out of the way of life, and you owe it to the infinite

forbearance of God, that you have not fallen into that pit which is deeper than the grave. How many have not numbered your months, yet they have been cut off out of the land of the living, and their souls “are reserved in chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day!” They no longer live and breathe upon the earth. Where are they? and what is their state? They are tormented day and night; their prospect is equally painful, as their present condition is miserable.

Before you proceed farther, contemplate, awhile, some of those who entered life about the same time with yourselves. And among these, put from your thoughts such as died in early life—all who did not arrive at man’s estate; this process will take half the companions of early childhood and youth from you. But of those who numbered one-and-twenty years, see some, even of them, who are placed as beacons to warn you of the



dangers you have, by the infinite mercies of the Lord, as yet escaped. How many die between the ages of twenty and forty years? How many of those whom you once knew, are dead? They promised to themselves long life, yet they died. "All men think all mortal but themselves." The husband has been cut off from the youthful wife; the wife has departed this life, and left a husband to mourn over her, and her motherless children. We may almost say of our families, what Moses remarked concerning the Egyptians, when God destroyed their first-born, that "there was not a house in which there was not one dead." Yet were these persons, to all appearance likely to number fewer days than you? Many of them were stronger than you—many of them more healthy. How came they to die? Some died by accident, suddenly, in a moment:—some have been smitten by the cold of winter; others, by the heat of summer. Some

have died of fevers, consumption, or the burning ague; and many, within these few years, have been hurried into eternity by a new and almost unheard-of disease, the cholera morbus.

There are in a population of six hundred people, nearly fifty persons between the ages of forty and fifty years—about one twelfth of the population; and in the world, there are probably about sixty millions of persons, men and women, between these ages. Let us consider a few moments the condition of this twelfth part of the village. Can it be, that only one fifth of this fifty come to the sacrament of the supper of the Lord? What is the spiritual condition of the remaining forty? Do they partake of the communion of the body and blood of Christ anywhere? We fear not. Can such persons be in a safe state before God? Can it be said of them, that they keep the ordinances as the apostles have enjoined them? When we incline to speak the most

favourably of them, we must complain of them, that they are lukewarm; yea, that they resemble the Israelites of whom God complains—"My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." They continue to halt between two opinions:—they refuse to obey the gospel, and to take upon themselves the yoke of Christ. For what are the pledges of their devotion to Jesus Christ withheld? For what are the grace and love of God in Christ Jesus sacrificed? For the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season; "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." And have any of these answered the expectation of those who have made them the objects of their pursuit? Not one of them, nor even all of them, if they could be possessed, would yield the satisfaction which men expect from them. One or other of these classes

of seeming good, every unregenerate person proposes, as a source of enjoyment. But Solomon informs us, that when they are tried under the most favourable circumstances, the true estimate of them all is, "vanity and vexation of spirit." If there were no other disappointment attending them, their want of continuance would be enough to render them unsatisfactory. If man will seek his happiness in a gourd, God prepares a worm to destroy its root, and it quickly withers and is dried up.

Let us, for the moment, however, leave considerations of this kind, though they of themselves should lead us to repentance. Let us turn our attention to the pious dead who have closed their mortal existence between the ages of which we are speaking. O how infinitely blessed is their condition! "They have finished their course, they have kept the faith"—"they have fought the good fight of faith, and have obtained the crown of victory"



—“they rest from their labours,” and “have entered into the joy of their Lord.” They have completely escaped the dangers to which they were exposed, and their feet, after being plucked out of the net which Satan ever and anon spread for them, now stand on Zion’s hill. They have indeed secured the prize of their high calling of God in Christ Jesus. They have bought the Pearl of great price : and if they sold even all that they had, in order to purchase it, they are infinite gainers by the exchange. They came, it may be, “out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.”

Those of you who have lived hitherto without repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, are ready to think that you have greatly the advantage of those of your own age, who



have died before you. You have indeed, if they died in their sins—if they were driven away in their wickedness, because they are shut up in the prison from whence they shall not come until they are brought forth to be judged by Christ at his appearance and kingdom, to be condemned by his righteous sentence, and to have their final award appointed to them: “Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

But in what is your condition superior to their’s? Not surely in this, that you can “enjoy the pleasures of sin” a little time longer, and they cannot: that you may still neglect the offers of mercy which are made to you in the gospel, but they have no more power to do this. In these respects, the advantage is not with the most prosperous sinner, who “drinketh iniquity as the ox drinketh up the water.” This is not considered by the wicked man, and it is too much lost sight

of by persons, who, on the whole, exercise a correct judgment on worldly matters.

Do you then ask, how the wicked who have been driven into darkness, and who are now in prison, can be exposed to less severe punishment, than the wicked who still live upon the earth? We answer, the souls of the wicked, who died in their sins, are no longer in a state of probation, as the sinners are who still live. They are no longer under *the law*, and therefore liable to incur fresh penalties for the breach of it; they are no longer under *the gospel*, and therefore exposed to new and more aggravated condemnation, for neglecting God's salvation—for resisting the Holy Ghost, and for trampling under foot the Son of God. The woes which Jesus Christ denounced against the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, confirm the train of observations I have made. Take the example of the inhabitants of Capernaum who had seen his mighty

works, and heard him speak as never man spoke. As we appeal to you, and by the terrors of the Lord persuade you to repentance, so Jesus appealed to them. "But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

In what respect, then, have the wicked who still live to show forth the long-suffering and patience of God, an advantage over their former companions in iniquity, who have been cut off out of the land of the living? God's anger burneth perpetually against these, and the voice of inspiration declares of those, "that God is angry with the wicked every day." There is, however, a possibility that the anger of God may be abated in the latter case, but not in the former. Both classes of persons are the enemies of God; but the wicked who live, may become reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. If we speak to such, our language is, "Now then we are ambassadors for

Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled unto God." Both the sinners who have died, and those alive upon the earth, are ungodly; but the former must continue so to all eternity; not so the latter. They may, by repentance and faith in Christ, become godly. Those cannot believe in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, so as to obtain mercy: these may believe in him that justifies the ungodly, and thus "receive the adoption of the sons of God."

The ungodly, in this state of probation, have a capacity for the blessings of pardon, holiness, and eternal life; the wicked whose course is finished, are not capable of any of these blessings. We must however remember, that the circumstance of being capable of an attainment, is far from being every thing necessary for the attainment itself. Many persons are capable of making great progress in learning, yet but few do so: for besides



capacity, men need self-denial, and great industry, and but few are willing to afford these. So in the matter of religion, there is no doubt, but that all wicked men who are placed under a dispensation of grace, and have not sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost, are capable of salvation. But will all be saved? Alas! no. Hear the complaint of Jesus Christ himself; "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." Men presume that they can command the will when they choose, but the will is the gift of God. Thus says our Saviour, "No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him." Men do not wish to come to Christ, until they see their sins to be more in number than the hairs of their head—until they find their guilt a heavy load—until they die to all hope of obtaining salvation from any other source.

The advantages of still living upon the earth, on which many felicitate them-



selves, are placed on a contingency opposed to the whole bent and tenor of their lives; namely, that of dying unto sin and living unto righteousness. Is it any advantage to sinners that they can abuse their reason by intoxication and intemperance? Has any one, who lives, any advantage over the dead, in that he can break the commandments? No lasting gain can be acquired in this way, “for what should it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” Surely over all such deluded persons, we must take up the lamentation of Moses, “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.”

Persons in the period of years contemplated at this moment, if raised above the lowest classes of society, are usually pursuing after competency, or riches, and honours, for themselves or their children. These are very important things, and, to a certain extent, lawful and necessary to

the well-being of the community. But when the attainment of such object is pleaded as an excuse for any breach of the divine law, or for any neglect of the gospel message which calls upon the impenitent to break off their sins by repentance, the pursuit becomes sinful. Let such persons know, that if they fritter away the brief season of their moral probation, they will at the day of judgment be in a worse state, than if they had died in the days of their youth.

Time, opportunities, and a capacity for salvation, are blessings to those who rightly use them; but they become the means of increasing the condemnation of those that abuse them. Men think much of prolonging mortal life, and deferring punishment; but they think little of the character and intensity of that punishment when it shall come; though the latter is of far more consequence than the former. This is important—let us look

at it more carefully. Suppose, for instance, that two men have been engaged together in committing burglary; they are taken into custody, one confesses the crime, and is admitted to give evidence for the king. His companion is condemned and suffers an ignominious death, but he is acquitted and restored to society. The soul of one awaits the last judgment of God in the abode of the dead; the soul of the other dwells still in its mortal body, where it seems to possess a decided advantage above its companion in guilt. But will this advantage be permanent? This, you reply, must depend upon his future conduct; if he resolutely pursues a system of complete reformation—if he forsakes his former vicious companions—if he perseveres in leading a godly, righteous, and sober life, he has a substantial advantage over his former companion in crime. If, however, as it too often happens, he returns to his evil ways, if he adds other more heinous crimes to that

for which his companion suffered death, and of which, in the sight of God, he was equally guilty ; and if, while running the career of evil, the arm of human justice falls upon him, and he dies a malefactor by the hands of the public executioner, does he now stand in a better position to meet the judgment of God, than his partner in sin, who was cut off before him ? No. The gnawing of a guilty conscience will be more terrible in him, who lived longer in sin, than in the other. It is true, he lived a few years longer than his companion, but in these he repented not of his wickedness : he filled up the measure of his sins, he heaped up wrath against the day of wrath, until wrath fell upon him, and he was driven into darkness.

Your life, my dear brethren, who number nearly half a century of years, is valuable, if you employ it in seeking repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ ; but prolonged



life will but heighten the condemnation of every one, who refuses to obey the gospel, and who neglects the salvation of God.

Peculiar reasons may be urged upon you, to repent of your sins, and to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of them.

1. The mercy of God, and his great forbearance toward you.

Forty years long has God been grieved with your refusals of his calls and invitations to consider your ways, and to return unto the Lord. You are alive, while so many of the companions of your youth are dead. You still live to show forth the praise of the Lord, but the dead praise not him, neither they that go down into silence. You might have been long ago shut up with "the spirits in prison," who lived before the flood, but you are yet in the place where God sheweth mercy to sinners. How great is the goodness, and long-suffering, and

tender forbearance of God to you ! The voice of mercy reaches to *you*, but *they* hear no more the message of peace. “ Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die ? ” “ As I live, saith the Lord, ” “ I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn, and live ye. ” *They* hear no more the words which inspire the desponding with hope, “ the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. ” God sends no more invitations to them, saying, “ Come now and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. ” What would be their bliss if *they* might again hear the words you this day hear ! “ If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous : and he is the propitiation for our sins ; and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world. ” “ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You have these and similar scriptures urged upon your attention again and again. These are indeed proofs that God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn unto him and live.

2. Not only consider the danger you have hitherto escaped, through the forbearance of God, but *the prospect* which is before you. What may you expect from continuing in rebellion against God? How few are the pleasures of sin that remain to you! how soon your sins will ruin you, if you do not leave them!

Some of your sins have already brought something of their own punishment after them. Some persons among you have tasted the bitterness of intemperance and excess. You have found "wine to be a mocker, and strong drink raging." Yea, that at the last, "it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." The bodily senses have in a measure be-

come cloyed, so that they do not yield you their wonted satisfaction. You may try the pleasures of savoury meals, and stimulating viands; but you will find these to hasten you into disease, and expose your lives to continual jeopardy. O that you would now “break off your sins by repentance,” that you would give glory to the Lord and make confession unto him, and each one say, “I will confess my sins unto the Lord:” then should the Lord “blot out your transgressions as a cloud, and as a thick cloud your sins;” yea, he should “remember your iniquities no more.”

Will you yet linger? “Remember Lot’s wife.” You are represented by the barren fig-tree: God’s justice says, “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” But though mercy still pleads to spare it, “Let it alone this year also, until I shall dig about it, and dung it:” yet, “the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, that bringeth not



forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near : let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Beware of two fatal rocks, upon one or other of which many have been dashed, and have made shipwreck of their salvation.

1. Lest you presume to stand before God on the ground of your own innocence.

There is great danger of this with those whose lives have been, before men, moral and respectable. However well satisfied you may be of your conduct toward your fellow-men, you must not presume upon innocence before God, for he seeth that every imagination of your hearts has been evil continually.

He declares, “there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” The standard by which you measure guilt and innocency may be imperfect, for it is no uncommon case to find, that, “that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of the Lord.” If you were able, like St. Paul, before his conversion, to acquit yourselves of any outward breach of the nine first commandments, surely you would be brought in guilty by the tenth—“Thou shalt not covet.” You would, if your hearts were not hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, be ready to smite upon your breast, and pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

2. Lest you should expect admission to heaven at death without repentance, till that period arrives.

If you entertain the thought that you shall, by repentance in your last hours, accomplish all that is necessary to obtain

a meetness for heaven, this will paralyze all your endeavours to put away sin. The expectation that the exercise of patience on a sick bed will make atonement for sin lulls many into a fatal security—they “cry peace, peace,” though “they walk on still in darkness.” Let me address to you the words of the prophet :—  
“Hear ye, and give ear ; be not proud : for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.”

You cannot escape if you neglect the salvation which God has provided for sinners. If you refuse to be saved as one of these, you must perish. Christ tells you, “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Attempt the duty of repentance in obedience to the Lord, and

reliance on his promises, and you shall in due time find the tears of repentance followed by the hope of salvation, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## LECTURE VI.

ADDRESSED TO THOSE ABOVE THE AGE OF  
FIFTY YEARS.

(*Sixth Sunday in Lent.*)

MATT. XIX. 26.

“With God all things are possible.”

WE have, in our discourses during the five preceding Sundays in Lent, addressed several classes of professing Christians, according to their respective ages. The persons whom we now wish to consider their ways, and to return unto the Lord, are advancing towards threescore years; yet during this lengthened period they have lived in disobedience to the

commandment of God, "that they should believe on his Son Jesus Christ." They have not obeyed the Saviour, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." They have refused the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, or they have not eaten it in faith. In short, they are persons, whether men or women, who to this present time are, in the language of St. Paul, "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures," "hateful, and hating one another." However humbling the description may appear, it is a true one : about one-seventh of the population of the parish, containing six hundred persons, are upwards of fifty years of age : yet of those who have so long shared in the long-suffering and patience of God, only about one-seventh come to the sacrament of the supper of the Lord. During so many years, God has called you to repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ, by the ministry of his servants ; but you have made light of the mes-

sage : you have put off religion from time to time, and you remain to the present moment insensible to its importance, and indisposed to seek after God.

If *children* must repent before they can be saved,—if *youth* must be converted,—if those commencing manhood, must cleanse their way,—if those who are making provision for their families must not refuse the invitations of the gospel,—if those who are in the full pursuit of fading riches and worldly honours must perish, unless they repent at the bidding of the Lord, what must be your condemnation, who have passed through these periods of life, and, in each, have refused the tenders of divine mercy ! You who have witnessed the death of so many of your fellow-creatures, do you not live monuments of divine mercy, and examples of the tender forbearance of God ? Look around, only one in seven or eight entered this world before you : the others who fill up the void which

death has created are your juniors. God has indeed spared you, but you must also fall by the arrows of this last enemy. "Your fathers, where are they?" Your dissolution is certain, and justly to be dreaded,—but there is something still more tremendous. "It is appointed to man once to die, and after this the judgment:" when God will render to every man according to his works. Yes, you must meet that trial, when "God shall judge the secrets of all men by Jesus Christ,"—"and then he shall reward every man according to his works." Then, "the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

What have you done to prepare for death, and for an approaching judgment? What place has religion had in your plans for securing the well-being of yourselves and your children? Have you lived without any conscience, or have you silenced your consciences, so that



they no more reprove you, though you neglect many things which you once held to be duties, and you commit sins, without remorse, at which you once shuddered ?

Some, who have arrived at these years, seldom attend the public worship of God ; surely these are fallen asleep in sin. Some, in the main, banish all thoughts of God, of heaven, and of hell, from their minds ; they “wink hard” against the thoughts of death and a judgment to come ; these are in danger of perishing in unbelief. Some have even taken the seat of the scorers : they turn a deaf ear to the gospel, whether it be read to them out of the Holy Scriptures, or it is preached to them by the ministers of God : they treat the gospel as a cunningly-devised fable, and they consider the ministers of religion as either weak enthusiasts or interested deceivers of others. These have indeed a veil of prejudice and delusion spread over their

hearts, and they are far from the kingdom of heaven. There are also others of this class of persons, who have become hardened in habits of sin, and being unwilling to be reformed, they extenuate their sinful habits, or consider that they are only their own enemies. Can such be saved without conversion? Surely, they “must be born again,”—surely, they must “be converted and become as little children, or they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.”

There are, in many places, fathers, whose children being obliged to witness their evil habits, too often learn to form the like. But the mischief arising to religion is not confined to fathers: there are wicked masters and husbands, yea, mothers and mistresses, who are profane in their conversation, and who take the name of God in vain—persons who give themselves up to murmuring and complaining—who do not bridle their tongues, “but speak all words that

may do hurt." They indeed verify the declaration of the Lord's prophet—"The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt: there is no peace to the wicked, saith my God."

In persons of this description, we see one and another, whose sinful habits have not been mortified,—we see them brought more completely under the dominion of some sins than they formerly were. They seem to be the sport of Satan, to be taken captive by him at his will. "They do evil, and therefore hate the light, neither come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." They remain under the guilt and pollution of their former sins, of which they have not repented, and they strengthen themselves in wickedness, by joining hands with those who have run the same course of iniquity. Let such, however, know, "that though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." "The

judgment of such lingereth not." "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged," saith the preacher, "yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God."

Be admonished to flee from the wrath to come: begin this day to pray to God through Jesus Christ, saying, "Turn thou us, good Lord, and so shall we be turned." You may, by the infinite mercy of God, be "a brand plucked out of the fire." God may magnify his mercy in answering your prayers, and granting you "repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of."

Besides the general corruption of a fallen nature, of which all the children of Adam are subjects, there are other means by which Satan keeps the aged in unbelief and disobedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.



1. He suggests to the minds of many, doubts respecting the truth of the christian religion.

Open and avowed disbelief of the authenticity and inspiration of the Bible, is not so frequently found among men who have neglected religion all their lives, as doubts upon the subject, which they are at no pains to have removed. It would indeed be far wiser in them who entertain doubts, to propose them for resolution, than to allow them to remain until they lead to practical unbelief and hardness of heart. Not any of these rest upon reasons which will bear examination: and frequently an objection to revealed religion carries its own refutation with it. Take an instance: the infidel denies the Bible to be inspired by God, or to possess any just claims to authenticity, because men, with show of reason, interpret its meaning so widely different. This objection equally lies against the authenticity of many ancient,

and some modern, writings; the authenticity of which could never be doubted, nor could the wisdom of those who composed them be impugned. The instances of opposite interpretations of written laws have never formed any serious objections to the authenticity of the statute law of the land. Nor will the circumstance that men rashly offer interpretations of the sacred Scriptures totally opposed to each other, form any valid objection to their authenticity and inspiration. "Ignorant and unlearned men wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction." But the Bible having forewarned mankind of this liberty which would be taken with its contents, retains its pretensions to be the word of God more firmly than if men had not misinterpreted its meaning. After all, it is an admonitory truth, that "objections are the growth of vulgar minds."

The Christian, however, cannot ever view any arguments which seem to militate against the truth of the Bible, as a

divine revelation, without deep emotion. For if the Scriptures, though they are admitted to contain important truths, were not inspired by the Holy Ghost, then all the Christian's hopes, both for time and eternity, are built upon a wrong foundation. The internal evidence of the truth of Scripture, when joined to the external testimony which history furnishes, form a body of evidence as satisfactory and consolatory to the friends of Revelation, as it is formidable to its enemies. With regard to the latter of these characters, it is worthy of observation, that while men doubt about the truth of the holy Scriptures, and do not cordially believe that God inspired the prophets and apostles to write them, they are the slaves of sin,—they are entangled in the net of the wicked one,—and they put affront upon the Saviour by rejecting him as “the way, the truth, and the life.”

O that such persons would make dili-

gent search before it be too late, for the Bible, which they almost persuade themselves to be false, will then be found true, when their knowledge of its truth will only serve to show them the good they have lost, and the ruin of both soul and body, which by their unbelief they have incurred. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

There are others, advancing in age, whose doubts regarding the truth of the Bible, as a revelation from God, do not extend to the whole Scriptures, but only to certain parts of them. They refuse to believe certain doctrines which the Scriptures contain. And in order to evade the force of them, they either deny them to be revealed, or they explain away the meaning of the terms in which they seem to be set forth, by false glosses and verbal criticism. Such doctrines as the following are frequently assailed :—the divinity of Jesus Christ,—the personality



and divinity of the Holy Ghost,—the necessity of divine influences in order to effect the conversion of men from sin to God,—the total corruption of human nature,—that man is justified by faith only, without respect to foreseen good works,—that the sole meritorious cause of man's salvation is the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ,—that personal holiness forms the capacity, and the qualification, for the enjoyment of eternal life,—that perseverance in the faith and practice of religion is indispensably necessary in order to salvation. “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” Some deny the Lord who bought them, and others doubt whether there be a hell of misery for the wicked, or a heaven of joy for the righteous. A still greater number question the justice of God in condemning men to eternal punishment for their sins, and hence they refuse to look to him for mercy through faith in the mediation and satisfaction of the Son of God.

While these partial denials are made, and these doubts remain, sin is cherished in the heart and practised in the life : plain duties, which God commands, are neglected, and men's consciences become seared as with a hot iron. Men, in such a state of mind, extenuate their guilt, refuse to make confession of their sins to the Lord, spurn the offers of the gospel, and refuse to join themselves to those who lead a christian life. There are men who love the world, while they hide from themselves this awful truth ; " If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Let those who entertain sceptical notions upon the subject of religion, seriously consider with themselves, whether secret sin does not lie at the root of their objections to the truth of the gospel. Obedience is here the path to knowledge. Christ himself declares, " If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine ;" that is, he shall come to a clear understanding of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

2. Satan prevails upon some who are advancing in years, to neglect religion, because of their *confirmed habits of sin*.

They say in their heart, “ we have followed idols, and after them will we go.” They have become the slaves of sin, and they promise themselves happiness in its pursuit. They have adopted a measure, by which they judge great sins to be little ones, and lesser sins to be virtues. The notion of “ a remedial law,” which will accommodate itself to the ability of every one, possesses them. They deny the spirituality and extensive nature of the commandments of God’s law, as our Saviour has explained them in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, 21—37. Thus they lessen their guilt, and plead for indulgence in some known transgressions, on the ground that they do not transgress often, or that they perform such good works, as help to atone for the offences of which they are guilty. These mistake

the Scriptures and take encouragement, though they do not repent, from words like these, "Charity shall cover a multitude of sins." If you press upon them the necessity of strict piety, they bring before you words of Scripture misapplied, "Be not righteous overmuch." They would make religion compatible with the practice of many sins. They say, Why should you be so strict—doth not the prophet ask, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

While they plead for their own sin, they are little affected either by the maledictions of the law, or the promises of the gospel. They set no real value upon Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of sinners—they despise the gospel of salvation, its ministers, and those who are reputed as the saints and followers of God—they find most happiness when they can forget God, death, the grave, and a future judg-



ment, which are to be followed by eternal happiness and eternal misery.

If the ministers of the gospel press upon them such scriptures as these, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;" then they turn away their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables. The messages of mercy excite the enmity of wicked men against the ambassadors of Christ, more than the threatenings of God's anger. They flee from the preaching of the gospel—they refuse to be saved as an act of mere mercy on the part of God—they will not believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. With all their guilt upon them,

they endeavour to justify themselves before the Lord : for “ they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” They know not, neither will they understand, “ that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth.” For the Scripture saith, “ Whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed ;—for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.”

Is any thing too hard for the Lord ? He waits to be gracious to you. “ To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” O then, “ rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God ; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

3. Others of this age, excuse their neglect of religion, by setting forth *the sins*

of those who have professed to be under its influence.

This is often a mere pretext, and has no solid foundation to rest upon. Examine the case. This, or that person, who makes a profession of religion, is said to have fallen into some sin, Does it not frequently happen, that the report is not true? or if true, that the circumstances are not as they have been represented? Why then should the wicked take delight in holding up to scorn the sins of the righteous? How few, when they think of the denial which Peter made of his master, the Lord Jesus, think of his subsequent sorrow, when “he went out, and wept bitterly!” Men who object to religion on this ground, make no difference between acts of disobedience and habits of transgression. They dwell upon the sins of the saints recorded in the Bible, but they conceal from themselves the temporal punishments which God sent upon them for their sins; and the repent-

ance and obedience which they showed to the end of their lives. If men believe the sins of good men to have been such as the Scripture declares, they must, in all fairness, believe their repentance and subsequent holy lives, on the same authority.

Money is so needful for the purposes of commerce, that men do not presently refuse all exchange of the precious metals, because some of the current coin is debased. The knowledge of the fact serves to awaken vigilance, but it does not paralyze effort. True and genuine religion is absolutely needful to every one, before he quits this world ; and how much more to those who are advancing in years ! The young indeed *may* die, but the old *must* die. O then let not these refuse to seek true godliness, because many have taken up with a counterfeit of it. “ Be not deceived, God is not mocked ; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap : he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he



that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

If you do not begin the work of your salvation until all objections to the doctrines of divine revelation, and to a holy life are removed from you, death will surprise each one of you, "Because there is wrath, beware lest *he* take thee away with his stroke; then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. Will he esteem thy riches? No, not gold, nor all the forces of strength." Objections to religion vanish before the light of divine truth, as the darkness before the light of the morning. Your prospects may be dark, when first you attempt to find the way of life and salvation; but you are warranted to expect divine guidance: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Son of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." "God filleth the hungry with good things, but the rich he sendeth empty away." "Blessed are they which do hunger and

thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

4. Men are induced to believe that those who avow their neglect of religion, are worthy of more regard than those who make a profession of it.

We frequently hear from persons advanced in life, words of this sort: "I make no profession of religion—I make no pretensions to be better than others;" "I am no hypocrite." This language is put forth,—first, to form a valid excuse for themselves in having throughout their whole lives, neglected the great salvation of God; secondly, it is intended to pass a censure upon those who make profession of serious piety, as if, in so doing, they only designed to deceive mankind. Surely in excuses of this kind, there is something very disingenuous, and which savours so much of disloyalty and treason against God and his Son Jesus Christ, that we must fear lest

such persons resist the Holy Ghost, and are led captive by Satan at his will.

Persons who prefer themselves to others on this ground, do in effect abjure the blessings of the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus, and condemn the message of mercy which God has sent to them ; “ preaching peace by Jesus Christ.” Is disobedience to the commandments of God, and to the gospel of Christ, no sin of which men should repent ? It is not any virtue that you have been obstinate in sin, and unbelief, and disobedience to God. Sometimes, indeed, these arguments are made a pretext for the neglect of the duty of public worship, and those means of grace which God has appointed for the salvation of men. The greatest hindrance to the conversion of men, is their unwillingness to be turned from sin to God ; “ Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.”

5. There is another plea which even those who have neglected their souls till

they are advanced in years will make, and which seems to excuse their immediate attention to religion : namely, that “ it is time enough yet.” They are persuaded to put off repentance for a season. Those, however, who put off religion to-day, under the impression that they shall be better disposed toward it at a future season, labour under a delusion. The time may never arrive to them. The Lord, who has been long provoked, may say to each one, “ This year, thou shalt die ;” or, “ Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.” If in things of this world, the precept is good, “ Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest ;” surely in the great business of saving the soul, it applies with double force.

The only safe guide to those who have gone astray like a sheep that is lost, is the Holy Spirit of God, even of Him “ who so



loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Hear what he says to you ? " Come now and let us reason together : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The salvation of sinners is entirely of grace, but their condemnation, in refusing to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ, will be upon their own heads. There is still an opportunity of mercy afforded to those who have hitherto " destroyed themselves. " Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." May the Lord the Holy Ghost give you grace to hear and receive the words of his prophets. " Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed ; and make you a new heart and a new spirit ; for why

will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn, and live ye ”

THE END.

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